



Exploratorium Teacher Institute

Mentoring Guide

Your main duties as a mentor are to host support group meetings for the new teachers and to co-lead workshops. We also recommend that you communicate frequently with the coaches of the beginning teachers in your support group.

As a supporter and mentor to new teachers, you're a role model and a sounding board. Although you won't be visiting the new teachers' classrooms, your support of the new teachers is an integral part of the Teacher Induction Program. Because you're currently a classroom teacher yourself, the new teachers will feel you understand their problems and successes.

Sometimes new teachers don't respond to invitations to support group meetings, and it's easy to feel rejected when they don't call or don't attend. If this happens, don't be discouraged. Remember that new teachers are very busy and often overwhelmed. Keep trying to communicate with them. See if you can offer help over the phone or via e-mail. Keep in contact with the staff at the Teacher Institute so we know what's going on.

Support Groups

You should set up your first support group meeting during the Beginning Teacher Orientation Day. Often two mentors will work together with a group of new teachers. We've found that forming larger groups with more than one mentor helps in keeping a critical mass of attendees at the meetings.

Each group will be different, with its own dynamics and rhythm. Some groups are more cohesive than others. New teacher attendance can be regular or erratic. The goals, however, are the same for all groups: to support the new teachers, to provide a safe place for asking questions and revealing doubts, and to encourage collegiality and group problem solving. Our hope is that the new teachers will build relationships with each other, and the mentors can eventually fade into the background.

“We spent a lot of time discussing what to do about tardiness and absences. We also talked about curriculum, especially genetics and evolution. Mostly, they needed some time to chat about these topics.”

—from a mentor's
support group report

Schedule and Location for Support Group Meetings

Try to have a regular monthly meeting schedule, such as the first Tuesday of the month. If you'll be meeting on weekdays after school, make sure your starting hour gives everyone a chance to get there on time. Plan for meetings to last two hours.

Find out if the new teachers would like to rotate the meetings among their classrooms. Most teachers are interested in seeing other teachers' rooms, and the host teacher can show off something successful she or he has done.

Some groups like to meet at a restaurant or coffee shop or have dinner at a member's house. Meetings can also be scheduled on Saturdays in the Learning Commons (formerly called the Library) at the Exploratorium. Call the Learning Commons at 561-0343 to find out if it's available on the dates you would like.

If you're meeting at a place where food isn't served, provide snacks!

Announcing Meeting Dates

Even if you have an established meeting schedule, you'll want to remind the new teachers and their coaches of your support group meeting dates about a week ahead of time.

Send an e-mail that includes an agenda. If the meeting will be in a teacher's classroom, provide the school address and contact information for the teacher who's hosting the meeting. Also phone the new teachers with a meeting reminder.

Meeting Topics

Usually the teachers need to vent a bit when they first arrive, but you should start a conversation about the topic on the agenda as soon as it seems appropriate. You and your group can develop a list of support group topics during the orientation meeting, or you can decide from meeting to meeting what the group wants to focus on. (See **Ideas for Support Group Meetings** on page 4.)

Remember—and remind participants—that what's said at a meeting stays there. Even if a teacher is having a problem that the Teacher Institute might be able to help with, ask the teacher if it's all right for you talk to the TI staff about it. It's very important that the new teachers feel confident that their privacy is respected.

Meeting Follow-up

Send a short e-mail to the teachers who attended, thanking them for coming and reminding them of any preparation needed for the next meeting (e.g., "Bring student work to next month's meeting.") You can also send a brief report of what was covered and the topic for the next time to the teachers who missed the meeting.

If you agreed to send something to a new teacher, do it. If any of your teachers need something that TI can help with, let us know.

File your report! (This is how you and the new teachers get paid!)

“We discussed five easy-to-do chemistry activities and how to gear them to students at different levels.”

—from a mentor's
support group report

“For our next meeting, we agreed to focus on the topic ‘differentiation and how to assess/score/grade.’ Members will bring examples of student work, lesson designs, assessment tools—whatever they think is appropriate to share.”

—from a mentor's
support group report

New Teacher Workshops

During the summer Leadership Institute we developed a list of topics for the workshops and agreed who would co-teach them. Contact your partner(s) well in advance to plan your workshop. Find out from TI how many teachers will be attending. Someone from TI will send an e-mail reminder to the teachers who are signed up. Assemble supplies, or ask the TI staff to get materials for you. Make copies of handouts.

The workshops usually take place at the Exploratorium, but some mentors have had sessions at their schools to demonstrate such things as lab safety or science supply organization.

Remember the following principles of adult learning when giving a workshop. (Obviously, many of them apply to younger learners as well.)

- Most adults learn best by doing. They benefit from working in small groups and can learn from the experiences of others as well as from their own experience. They like to network, so promote discussions among members of the group.
- Adults don't like to have their time wasted. Have an agenda, be responsive to the needs of individuals and the group, and have specific, concrete remedies for problems you are addressing.
- Adults need to feel successful. Be sure people know what's expected of them by providing ground rules, and giving clear directions such as when to return from breaks.
- Protect adults' self-esteem. Be accommodating to latecomers and those who may have to leave early.
- Adults appreciate a certain level of comfort, and they are better disposed to learn in an environment that provides amenities such as refreshments, breaks every 90 minutes or so, and enough space to work and store their things.

Mentoring offers a unique opportunity to bring together new teachers in a setting that will broaden their experience with different school settings and with the progress and struggles of other new teachers. It can be critical to the success of teachers during their first two years.

Ideas for Support Group Meetings

Go to each others' classrooms

Do an activity

Go to a free lecture series

Go on shopping trips

- Tap Plastics
- The Dollar Store
- Smart and Final
- Home Depot or Lowe's

Go on a field trip

(The following are suggestions for the Bay Area, but other communities will have some similar destinations)

- Go for a hike, a ferry ride, or to a ball game
- The Bay Model in Sausalito
- Treasure Island
- SEP (Science Education Partnership) at UC Medical Center in SF
- Lick Observatory
- RAFT (Resource Area For Teachers) in San Jose
- EBMUD (East Bay Municipal Utility District)—offers tours of the water treatment plant
- Angel Island
- Alcatraz
- Crissy Field Center (educator-friendly)
- The Chabot Science Center
- Hiller Aviation in San Mateo
- Golden Gate Park
- Strybing Arboretum in Golden Gate Park (has a large botany library)
- San Francisco Art Institute
- USGS (United States Geological Service) in Menlo Park
- Anchor Steam Beer brewery
- Scharfenberger Chocolate Factory in Emeryville
- Lawrence Hall of Science
- The Ramp, in SF, for a drink
- The dump!

Some possible discussion topics

- Grading papers
- Understanding the culture of school
- How to create a supportive environment
- Time management
- How to do inquiry-based teaching
- Teachers' contracts—rights and responsibilities
- Resources for students and their families

Exploratorium, San Francisco, CA 94123
www.exploratorium.edu
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